

# Nutrition Tips for Growing Children

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## You Set the Example

Most of us can still remember what fun we had as children exploring the many tastes, colors and textures of food. What we probably didn't realize at the time was the fact that we were developing the foundations of a very important health skill — one that would affect us for the rest of our lives.

Children who eat well regularly are alert and energetic. They are better able to resist illness and infection while developing into healthy adolescents. As well, adults who ate well as children are far less likely to suffer the consequences of poor nutrition such as heart disease, high blood pressure or obesity.

A child learns from experience and by imitation — so it's up to you as an adult to set the example. And don't forget the element of fun — show your children a sense of adventure and discovery when it comes to food and good eating habits!

## Canada's Food Guide

Canada's Food Guide provides sound nutritional guidance for children and adults alike. It recommends a varied diet based on four important food groups. (**Note:** Recommended serving sizes are for adults. Children naturally will eat less. See section on "Child Size Meals and Appetites" p. 4).

## 1. Milk and Milk Products

2 – 3 servings/day

This food group provides calcium, protein, vitamins A and D, and riboflavin for the development of healthy bones, teeth and tissues.

Foods in this group consist of milk in all its forms: skim, 2 per cent, whole, evaporated, buttermilk and milk made from skim milk powder. Milk products include cheese, yogurt and ice cream. Sample servings are:

- 250 mL (1 cup) milk
- 175 mL ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) yogurt
- 45 g (1  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz.) cheese

If your child doesn't happen to like plain milk, try serving it in other ways such as in custards, soups, casseroles and puddings.

## 2. Fruits and Vegetables

4 – 5 servings/day

Fruits and vegetables supply vitamins A and C, iron and fibre to the diet. These nutrients maintain healthy skin, protect against infection and ensure healthy blood. Sample servings are:

- 125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) fruit or vegetable juice
- 125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) of any vegetable or fruit (equivalent to a medium-sized apple or potato)

At least two servings from this group should be vegetables (especially the dark green, yellow and orange varieties). The other two or three should be fruits or fruit juices, one of which is high in vitamin C (e.g., orange juice or vitaminized apple juice).

There are many fruit-flavored drinks, crystals, and powder mixes available in supermarkets. Many of these contain water, sugar, artificial flavoring and sometimes vitamin C, but are lower in other nutrients normally found in juices.

### 3. Breads and Cereals

3 – 5 servings/day

Breads and cereals contain B vitamins, iron, carbohydrate and fibre. These nutrients ensure normal functioning of the nervous and digestive systems.

Foods in this group consist of grains and grain products: rolls, muffins, crackers, whole-grain breads, breakfast cereals, pancakes, pasta (noodles, macaroni, spaghetti, etc.), barley, cornmeal and rice. Sample servings are:

- one slice of bread
- one roll or muffin
- 125 – 175 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  –  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) cooked pasta
- 125 – 175 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  –  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) ready-to-eat or cooked cereal

Choose whole-grain breads and cereals over refined ones, because these contain more nutrients and fibre. Avoid sugar-coated cereals — they cost more and can cause your child to develop a “sweet tooth” and possible weight problems later in life. Also, serve unsalted crackers.

### 4. Meat, Fish, Poultry and Alternates

2 servings/day

This food group contains the B vitamins, iron, and protein necessary for normal growth. These nutrients also promote tissue repair. Though meat is a popular part of our diet, other foods from this group are just as nutritious and often more economical. Examples of these are: poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, peanut butter, tofu, seeds and legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils). Sample servings are:

- 60 – 90 g (2 – 3 oz.) cooked fish, poultry, meat or liver
- two eggs
- 60 mL (4 tablespoons) peanut butter
- 250 mL (1 cup) cooked legumes

## Child-Size Meals and Appetites

Remember, by following Canada's Food Guide, you will know best **what** your child should eat. Your child, however, will usually be the best judge of **how much** he or she needs to eat.

Keep in mind too that recommended serving sizes in Canada's Food Guide are for adults, so adjust children's portions accordingly. It's better to keep children's servings small and let them ask for seconds. Large portions can be overwhelming and unappetizing. Encouraging children to overeat (often done by insisting they always "finish off their plates") may lead to weight problems later on. You may discover your child prefers five or six small meals to three large ones. This is perfectly normal.

It is also normal for children's appetites to vary from day to day, and from year to year, depending on their rate of growth. After year one, for instance, growth rate slows down. So a child's appetite will decrease accordingly between years one and two.

If you are concerned about your child's appetite, try using a chart like the one on page 15 to record how much he or she is eating each day for a period of a week. You may be worrying needlessly, or you may discover you are indeed on to something and that your child's eating habits should change.

## Beware of Choking

You can reduce the possibility of children choking on food by keeping a close watch on them (especially those three years and under) whenever you serve them food they could accidentally inhale.

As a rule, beware of foods that are small, round or smooth as they can slip into the windpipe and block it. Examples include hard candies, raw peas or beans, grapes, hot dogs, popcorn, nuts and kernel corn. Also, be alert when serving children hard foods such as raw carrots, which can get into the windpipe before being properly chewed.

## Let Children Explore

Encourage your children to explore food — the more they understand it, such as where it grows and how to handle it, the more they will enjoy eating it.

So, next time you're about to crack an egg or husk corn in the kitchen, invite the help of your son or daughter. Teach your children to explore the color, smell, taste and texture of nutritious foods. By doing this you will help them accept new foods. Tell them where these foods grow and why they are important. If you can catch their interest you will soon see your efforts pay off.

As a starter, try some of the activities listed below:

### 1. Story Telling

There are many nursery rhymes and folk tales that deal with the subject of food. Do you remember "Jack and the Beanstalk", "The Three Bears", "Little Miss Muffet", or "Little Jack Horner"? Also, try playing some children's music recordings that focus on food and nutrition.

## **2. Working in the Garden**

If you have a few square feet to spare in your backyard to grow some vegetables, you could be in for more help tending your garden than you bargained for! Children love playing in sand and earth to begin with, so it's often easy to redirect this pleasant pastime into an educational one too.

## **3. Mystery Box**

All children seem to enjoy guessing games. Place food in a box and ask your children to close their eyes and reach into the box with one of their hands. Then ask them to describe what they feel. What shape? What texture? What size? What name? Use the "Mystery Box" as a way of introducing nutritious snack foods to your children. This type of game is a regular hit at birthday parties as well as at home.

## **4. Cooking**

Teaching your children to pour, peel, stir, spread (and of course, clean up!) is the best way to teach them about food. Children learn about color, taste, texture and preparation all at the same time. At a young age, they also learn a valuable skill they will depend on later in life.

## Keep it Simple

Children will often prefer the simple dish to the kind that features rich sauces and unusual flavor combinations. That's because children like to know what they are eating. They also like pure, natural flavors.

So don't worry about not being a gourmet cook. Variety in the texture, taste, and color of simple foods that are easy to prepare will be enough to stimulate the tastebuds of even the most particular child. Every now and then try using brightly-colored placemats and dishes. Eye appeal can add greatly to the enjoyment of any dish!

## Creative Snacking

Young stomachs are small and can't always hold enough to carry a child through to the next meal. Children often need between-meal snacks, so make sure the snacks they eat are nutritious (from Canada's Food Guide). Here are some tasty examples:

- cottage cheese or peanut butter on whole-grain cracker or celery stalk
- fruit juice popsicle
- bran muffin
- bagel with melted cheese
- orange juice and yogurt mixed in a blender
- cheese chunks
- fresh fruit

Teach your children to avoid sweet snacks such as candies, cookies or soft drinks. These offer little food value and promote tooth decay. Natural sweets such as raisins or dried fruit can be particularly damaging to teeth because they are sticky.

Also, encourage your children to stay away from salty snacks such as potato chips and pretzels. High salt intake over many years may contribute to high blood pressure in later life.

Advertising may influence the type of snacks – including sugary and salty products – that a child requests. In face of this, it is important to teach your child that other foods may be better choices as snacks.

And remember – a child learns by example. Teach your child good snacking habits by practising them yourself!

## Travelling with a Child

To eat well while travelling, especially with children, plan and prepare your food in advance. Use Canada's Food Guide to select your meals, and cut and package as much food as you can into individual portions. Here's a good selection of foods you can take on the road:

- raw vegetables such as cauliflower, green pepper or celery
- fresh fruits
- cans of unsweetened fruit juice (refrigerate or freeze first to keep other foods cold)
- chunks of meat, chicken legs, etc. (freeze and let thaw on the way or store in a cooler)
- small containers of yogurt
- hard-boiled eggs
- bite-size pieces of cheese
- whole-wheat rolls, muffins or crackers

When visiting restaurants, especially the fast food kind, help your children pick the most nutritious meals from the menu. For instance: cheeseburger and juice, fishburger and milk or pizza and milk can be supplemented with fresh fruit to create a well-rounded meal.

Make sure you or your children don't over-eat, especially while on the road. Splitting a large restaurant meal with your child will prevent discomfort and drowsiness when you begin travelling again.

## Parties and Special Occasions

Canada's Food Guide is versatile and easy to use. Add to it a bit of your own good imagination and you can prepare an amazing variety of party foods that are tasty and healthful:

- fresh, unsweetened fruit juice
- fresh fruit "smoothies" — in a blender, mix milk or juice with fresh or frozen fruit. To make the drink thicker and more like a milk shake, add a banana, ice cubes and a spoonful of powdered milk
- raw vegetables pieces: bite-size portions of celery, green peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, mushrooms and tomatoes
- homemade pizzas are fun to make and are a satisfying treat for party-goers of all ages. Use whole-wheat dough or the ready-made kind and top with tomato sauce, cheese, mushrooms, green pepper and meats.
- carrot cake with cream cheese icing

## **A Word on Vitamin and Mineral Pills**

There is no effective substitute for good food habits. Your body requires over 50 nutrients each day, and you can only get these from a properly balanced diet. So if your children aren't eating well, supplements won't make up for it. And if they are eating well, it is highly unlikely they need them.

If supplements are taken in large doses they can be harmful. Further, supplements can be hazardous. During recent years, serious accidental poisonings have occurred with small children who got into vitamin bottles.

There are some situations, however, in which a supplement can be helpful. If, for instance, your drinking water does not contain naturally occurring or added fluoride, your dentist may advise your children to take fluoride tablets to help protect their teeth against decay.

For further information on vitamin or mineral supplements, consult your doctor or nutritionist.

## **For More Information**

If you want to know more about nutrition, please consult a public health nutritionist or nurse at your local health unit, your physician or a registered professional dietitian. Health units are listed under municipal government services in the blue pages of your telephone directory.



## COMMON EATING PROBLEMS . . . AND HOW TO COPE

COMMON EATING PROBLEMS	AS YOUR CHILD SEES IT	AS YOU MAY SEE IT	AND HOW TO COPE
Refusal to eat	I'm not hungry. I'm sick. I've found a new way to get attention.	I must make him eat: growing children need food.	Respect the wisdom of your child's own body. A skipped meal will not hurt a healthy child, so remove the food without fuss after a reasonable length of time (20-30 minutes). Involve your child in food shopping, preparation and serving, for example, pouring her own milk, making sandwiches, setting the table.
Food jags: getting hooked on one food	I've found a wonderful new food. I've found a way to manipulate my mother.	I must make sure she eats a sensible diet.	Food jags aren't unusual in children or adults and won't last long if no issue is made of them.
Dislike of new foods	I don't like the taste of this food. I don't want to try anything new today.	I like this food. I think my child should learn to like it too, and should adjust to our family's eating patterns.	Children, like adults, will have a few dislikes. If you have time, a substitute food from the same food group may be offered. If the dislike is treated casually, your child will probably learn to like it at a later date.

Rejection of vegetables	I don't like the texture or smell of cooked vegetables. Daddy never eats them. I'm bored with having the same one over and over again.	I think my child should eat cooked vegetables as part of a sensible diet.	It doesn't matter whether the vegetables are eaten cooked or raw. Just be sure they are not overcooked. Children often prefer the bright colors and crisp textures of raw vegetables. Vegetable juices are another alternative.
	Remember children are the world's best imitators. Your likes are quickly noticed — and copied.		
Dawdling, or playing with foods.	I want to explore this food. I need time to get used to these utensils. I'm not hungry. I'm too tired.	I don't think children should play with their food.	A child needs time to learn to use utensils. If you're a fast eater you might occasionally take the time to eat slowly with your child. You might begin feeding your child a few minutes before the rest of the family. Children learn by touching — give them time to explore food.
Overeating	I get approval and attention from the family when I eat a lot. Everyone else asks for seconds.	When he's good I reward him with a cookie. He'll outgrow his baby fat. A child should learn to clean his plate.	Reduce portion sizes. Don't force your child to take "just one more bite" or "clean his plate." Learn to prepare foods without adding extra energy — avoid sauces, breading or frying. Encourage more physical activity. Use a few kind words, a hug, a game, a toy, etc., as rewards and comforters rather than food.

Table adapted from "Food for Little Folk" —  
a British Columbia Ministry of Health Publication

## A SAMPLE MENU

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Food group	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Snacks throughout the day	Total recommended servings
FRUITS & VEGETABLES	125 mL (½ cup) unsweetened apple juice	raw vegetables	125 mL (½ cup) carrots	banana	4 to 5
MILK & MILK PRODUCTS	125 mL (½ cup) milk	125 mL (½ cup) milk	175 mL (¾ cup) yogurt		2 to 3
MEAT, FISH, POULTRY & ALTERNATES		30 mL (2 tbsp.) peanut butter	60 g (2 oz.) chicken	30 g (1 oz.) cheese	2
BREADS & CEREALS	175 mL (¾ cup) ready-to-eat whole-grain cereal	1 slice whole-wheat bread	125 mL (½ cup) rice	1 muffin	3 to 5

Note: Total quantity of food meets the recommendations of Canada's Food Guide. See Canada's Food Guide (p 1) and Child Size Meals and Appetites (p 4).

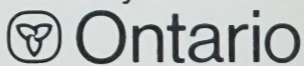
# HOW IS YOUR CHILD DOING TODAY? WRITE IN WHAT SHE OR HE EATS, BELOW

Food group	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Snacks throughout the day	Total servings for today	Total recommended servings
FRUITS & VEGETABLES						4 to 5
MILK & MILK PRODUCTS						2 to 3
MEAT & ALTERNATES						2
BREADS & CEREALS						3 to 5





Ministry of Health



Elinor Caplan, Minister

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